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Book Review

Gabriel Sheffer, **Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, xiii+290 pp., \$44.99, ISBN 9780521811378

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Throughout history, individual and mass migrations have taken place. Diasporas emerged from these migrations as people of same ethnic group settle in the host country. Entering the 21st century, it is evident that there are many diasporas throughout the world and there has been a development in this field in the literature. Gabriel Sheffer's book "Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad" which was first published in 2003, is one of the important books that deals with the concept of diaspora. The book consists of 10 chapters. These chapters are, in order, Introduction; Diasporism and Diaspora in History; A Collective Portrait of Contemporary Diasporas; Diasporas in Numbers; The Making, Development, and Unmaking of Diasporas; Stateless and State-Linked Diasporas; Trans-state Networks and Politics; Diasporas, the Nation-State, and Regional Integration; Loyalty, and the last chapter is Diasporas at Home Abroad. In his book, Gabriel Sheffer describes how people who live abroad somehow try to develop special ties with their homeland, and also try to experience the feeling of being at home even when abroad (p. XIII). Sheffer describes these human communities as "diaspora" (p. 10); the structural, organizational, and behavioral characteristics of these "diasporic" (p. 11) communities and the noticeable and visible state of all these characteristics as "diasporism" (p. 12). In addition, Sheffer discusses the concept of diaspora along with ethnic-national concepts, since these communities come together due to the identity of the same nation. (p. 10). In this vein, Sheffer's main thesis is that the diaspora is not an imaginary or invented community, but rather an organized, concrete entity that tries to experience the feeling of being at home while abroad by continuing relationships with the homeland. To support this thesis, he tries to prove that diaspora is not a modern concept by giving different examples throughout history.

Sheffer makes some classifications about diasporas according to connections with home and hostland, according to its historical existence and according to the activities of the diasporas. He categorizes diasporas depending on their connection with the homeland as *stateless* or *state-linked* (p. 148). He categorizes according to historical existence, *ancient (historical)* or *modern*. And lastly, he categorizes them according to the activities of the diaspora as *incipient*, *dormant* or *active*. Sheffer states that in all diaspora types, voluntary or forced migration is a common feature, and the migration event has an important effect on making a diaspora possible (p. 83). Diasporas also apply different strategies according to their relationship with the hostland and homeland as *assimilationist* (p. 162), *integrationist* (p. 163), *communalist* (p. 164), *autonomist* (p. 169), *irredentist* (p. 170), or *separatist* (p. 170). According to Sheffer, in general, state-linked

diasporas adopt the communalist strategy to establish relationships with the hostland on diplomatic, economic, social, and political grounds. Hereby, state-linked diaspora establishes legal institutions in the hostland to reach a safe and respectable position in that land.

Sheffer repeatedly states that we are in a "post-nationalist world order", even so, national belonging is essential in the formation of diasporas, and paradoxically stateless diasporas struggle to establish an independent national state (p. 209). Sheffer's claims that we are in a post-nationalism era; that diasporas are formed by ethno-national belongings; and that stateless diasporas strive to establish an independent nation, may cause a conceptual contrast in the reader's mind. Although Sheffer was aware that these claims were paradoxical, he continued to argue his statement.

Sheffer argues that diasporas, in general, are not a threat to the homeland or hostland. According to Sheffer, only some activities of stateless diasporas may be described as harmful to the hostland or homeland (p. 245). However, looking at some examples in the book, especially those from the history, shows that the nation-building intentions of some diasporas may be a threat to the homeland. Even so, Sheffer thinks that diasporas will not be harmful to the hostland. Sheffer maintains his optimistic approach, but he is clearly aware that stateless diasporas could produce some negative outcomes, such as terrorism. Moreover, he is aware that terrorism is only the tip of iceberg and these diasporas use many different methods in their attempts through resources such as money, weapons, warriors, and military intelligence (p. 159). For Sheffer, the solution to some negative effects of stateless diasporas is that the homeland should fulfill the demands of the stateless diaspora at a basic level. This basic level means that the homeland should help the stateless diaspora to establish an independent state, so newly state linked diaspora will no longer be a threat to the homeland (p. 160). However, Sheffer's these claims create another contradiction in the book.

According to Sheffer, diasporas will play an important role in future social and political arrangements at global and regional levels (p. 217). He emphasizes that diasporas will contribute to peace at local, regional, and global levels and will assume a compromise role between the homeland and hostland (p. 258). He also believes that in the post-national world order, diasporas will act as a bridge that prepares the ground for a peaceful economic, commercial, and cultural flow (p. 83, 201). In addition to this belief, he even claims that diasporas will differ from the agenda, interests, and needs of the homeland in the long run, so that over time they can continue without the support of the homeland, and even that diasporas will come to a new inter-state threshold: a federation of autonomous entities. (p. 248). Since today's world is still dominated by the idea of nation, Sheffer's claim about autonomous entities is uncertain. However, only time will tell how possible this uncertainty will be.


Sheffer strengthens his thesis by explaining the basic arguments he sets out in his book through many different recent and historical examples. Many of the topics discussed and defended in the book are supported by concrete examples. The most obvious example of this is that diaspora is not a new phenomenon, but rather an enduring concept that has existed throughout history. In his book, Sheffer focuses on, "historical state-linked diasporas" such as Jewish, Greek, Chinese, and Armenian diasporas that emerged in antiquity or during the Middle Ages and became linked to nation-states that were created in much later periods (p.

75). Sheffer emphasizes that this concept has been neglected until recently and it has come back to the agenda with the spread of transportation, communication, and globalization, and he insists that the historical depth of the concept should not be ignored. By drawing the reader's attention to this point, he examines the concept of diaspora, in detail, in different categories, and makes important contributions to the literature on this topic. In addition, the fact that Sheffer investigates this concept from examples of many different countries and diasporas, allows him to create generalizations about diasporas by revealing common features of diaspora.

Diasporic communities are in a position that both effects and is affected by the political practices of the hostland, the manipulative attitudes of the homeland, and the political impact of regional events. However, diasporas develop transnational identities and bilateral belongings. The diaspora community, rather than an assimilating or integrating, seems to have developed a new form of identity and belonging and is even required to do so. This causes diasporic communities to develop a new collective form (community), that is neither fully dependent on the homeland, nor the hostland. Political tensions that may arise between the hostland and homeland will not only cause intense cultural differences between the homeland and the diaspora, but also create a basis for political turmoil between the hostland and the diaspora. For example, different diasporas in Western Europe benefit from the hostland's values in their practical and relations with Islam. This is evidence of the beginning of cultural differentiation. Also based on this, we can say that in the long term, Islam will be integrated in these regions. In another example, the public sphere of legal institutions that are considered to be nationalist creates isolation due to political tensions between European countries and homeland. This could lay the groundwork for political turmoil and dissociation in these countries.

Diasporas have the opportunity to undertake important roles at local, regional, and global levels and regulate the relations between their homeland and hostland. However, Sheffer claims if diasporas are suppressed due to regional and political tension between two countries, this may lead the diasporas to establish a new administrative formation that is independent from the influence of the hostland and homeland. The main thesis of Sheffer book is to demonstrate that, first, ethno-national diasporas are not a modern phenomenon, second, diasporas are neither imagined nor invented communities, and lastly, that ethno-national diasporas will be the precursors of globalized political systems in the world of the twenty-first century (p. 257-258).

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